

Adult school teachers get layoff notices from Centinela Valley school district

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Citing a dismal economy, the Centinela Valley school board is pink-slipping the vast majority of its adult-education teachers, sparking widespread concern that the district is angling to shut the program down.

The issue came to light Tuesday evening, when the school board held a special meeting to discuss budget cuts affecting the district, which serves the Hawthorne, Lennox and Lawndale areas. Packing the board room were about 200 worried students and teachers, some of whom carried makeshift placards begging the board to spare adult ed.

"I'm just sickened by this," Jack Foreman, president of the teachers union, told the board. "Summer school has already been eliminated. If there is no summer school and no adult school, how are our struggling students going to graduate?"

The discussion in Centinela comes at a time when adult education is on the chopping block elsewhere in the region. The Los Angeles Unified school board on Tuesday will consider a wholesale elimination of the program, which serves an estimated 300,000 students every year. Students are planning a march in San Pedro on Friday to protest the potential retrenchment.

In Centinela, district officials insist there are no current plans to shut down the entire adult-ed program. But they say it could be severely reduced if California voters fail to pass at least one of several tax-hike initiatives that would raise money for schools.

"Every school district must prepare a budget which assumes that the initiatives will not succeed," said Jose Fernandez, superintendent of the Centinela Valley school district. "What you have before you is a worst-case scenario."

The board on Tuesday night voted to give pink slips to about 85 percent of the staff at the adult school, sparing the full-time equivalent of just 3 1/2 positions. At least 18 others will receive layoff notices.

The board also decided to send layoff notices to about 20 teachers from the district's high schools: Leuzinger, Hawthorne and Lawndale. In addition, it paved the way to impose a seven-day furlough for all district employees.

By law, school districts must send layoff notices to teachers before March 15 to give them time to find employment elsewhere. Usually, the vast majority of layoffs are rescinded before the fall.

School districts also are legally obligated to hold public hearings before shutting down their adult-ed programs. District officials say there are no current plans to hold such a hearing in Centinela.

If carried out as proposed on Tuesday, the cut to Centinela Valley's adult-ed program would mean the end of nearly all the programs - including classes for dentistry, career technical education, computer skills and office occupations.

However, some classes are not on the chopping block. These include courses for English as a Second Language, and programs helping lagging students earn their GEDs and diplomas.

District officials say the fate of the programs will be in the hands of California voters in November. On the ballot will be several competing initiatives to raise taxes for schools. These include one from Gov. Jerry Brown that would generate \$7 billion a year for five years, the so-called "millionaires tax" floated by the California Federation of Teachers and a proposal by civil rights attorney Molly Munger to levy a broad income-tax hike.

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